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DEA chief scores U.S. reluctance to eradicate drugs

By John McCaslin
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The United States' reluctance to implement an effective drug eradication program within its borders is sending "mixed signals" to drug-producing nations such as Mexico, the acting administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration told Congress this week.

DEA chief John C. Lawn, who returned last week from an extended fact-finding trip to Mexico, told the House subcommittee on crime that eradication measures the United States is asking other nations to increase "are things that we are not doing internally. And that gives very mixed signals to countries like Mexico," Mr. Lawn said.

During Mr. Lawn's trip, Mexican officials questioned him at length "about what the United States was doing in [drug] reduction," he said.

"Where Mexico has begun an eradication program on the cultivation of cannabis, we in the United States do not have such a program," Mr. Lawn complained.

The United States has sharply criticized the Mexican government in recent months, charging that Mexico was not cooperating fully with eradication efforts and that corruption was prevalent within law enforcement circles and the government, possibly as high as Cabinet level.

But the National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee estimates that domestic cultivation provided about 30 percent of the U.S. marijuana supply as recently as 1982. Studies indicate that marijuana has become the third largest U.S. cash crop behind corn and soybeans. It is estimated that up to 200,000 Americans engage in marijuana farming as their primary source of income, with most of the crop grown on federal forest and park land. The top marijuana producing states in order are California, Hawaii, Kentucky, Oregon and North Carolina.

Mr. Lawn's complaints were echoed by Rep. Daniel E. Lungren, R-Calif., who said the United States "can direct a lot of anger, concern, anxiety, frustration with the Mexican government because of lack of cooperation... and lack of action we see on eradicating drugs in that area. But if we are asking them to do things that we have not decided to do, I guess the word hypocritical comes up.

"Maybe the public and those of us in positions to make some decisions ought to recognize that it's a lesson for us as well. This situation is such a severe one that maybe we're going to have to be more serious within our own borders as we ask those other countries outside our borders to help us in that," Rep. Lungren said.

Mr. Lawn, appearing before the subcommittee to discuss DEA's fiscal 1986 budget request — totaling more than \$345 million — spent the majority of his testimony answering questions about corruption in Mexico. The questions centered on Mexico's handling of the Feb. 7 kidnapping and subsequent slaying of Mr. Enrique Salazar Camarena, reportedly by known Mexican drug traffickers.